We’re moving closer to a legislated approach to nutrition care in Australian aged care

Dietitians Australia is continuing its advocacy for the food and nutrition rights of older Australians, giving evidence to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee: Inquiry into Aged Care Bill 2024.

Chief Executive Officer Magriet Raxworthy and Senior Policy Officer Vanessa Schuldt appeared as witnesses at the Senate Inquiry in Brisbane, advocating for inclusions to enable a stronger assurance that older Australians’ nutrition and dietetic care needs will be met.

“The food and nutrition rights of older Australians is at the heart of our work in aged care, and we want to ensure older Australians receiving care at home and in residential facilities, are guaranteed the right to live a nourished, dignified life.” Dietitians Australia Chief Executive Officer Magriet Raxworthy said.

“We welcome the Aged Care Bill's inclusion of rules requiring aged care providers to deliver food and drink that meets the nutritional needs and preferences of each older person.

“This only applies to residential aged care, but it is important for it to also apply to community-dwelling older adults receiving home-delivered or centre-based meals,” Ms Raxworthy said.

“Older Australians receiving home-delivered or centre-based meals deserve the same protections and standards of nutrition care as those in residential settings, and now is the

time to ensure that is guaranteed," Dietitians Australia Senior Policy Officer Vanessa Schuldt said.

"Older Australians have unique nutrition needs. They require higher amounts of protein and calcium to maintain muscle and bone health. It is vital to meet these increased nutrition requirements, which can be tricky when a person's appetite diminishes later in life.

"Making every mouthful matter is key as we age.

"This is why it is so critical to have access to the support of dietitians in aged care. Poor nutrition and reduced food intake can escalate to significant weight loss and malnutrition very quickly.

"Based on the data available – we know aged care residents receive less than 12 minutes of dietetic care per quarter–which is alarming, given the high rates of significant unplanned weight loss recorded," Ms Raxworthy said.

"We need a commitment to needs-based allied health care, including dietetic care, to ensure older Australians are not at risk of neglect regarding their health and nutrition needs.

"It is heartening we are progressing towards this, with the announcement this week from Minister Wells to introduce quality indicators for allied health in residential facilities, and we look forward to working with the Government to advance this work.

For media enquiries and interviews, contact our Media Manager on 0409 661 920.

Note to Editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice in nutrition and dietetics, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia.